



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

# Open Gardens South Australia

## Welcomes you to

# Orcombe Farm

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2023

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Welcome to Orcombe Farm .

When we bought this property at the end of 2016 it was just a 1970s house on a hill with a single *Pittosporum undulatum* and a Rosemary bush out the front, an old Almond tree in the paddock, and a whole lot of weedy, dusty, hot and dry open paddock. In my eyes, it was a wonderful inspiring blank canvas with a magnificent view on which to create my dream garden. We began in 2017 and 2018, removing the weeds, sculpting the land, and preparing and planting the first garden area and lawn in front of the house. It became very apparent that my original vision of my dream garden would have to be greatly amended!

This house and property do not have any mains water or bore water, the only water available is rainwater. While I was trying to build and create a garden, temperatures were very hot, and rainfall in 2018 was 24% below average. I also vastly underestimated the hot dry winds that come from being so exposed on an open slope that just dehydrate the earth. We had to prioritize the little rainwater we had in our tanks to the house, so, unfortunately, the lawn and some of the plants died. This forced my planting scheme to adapt to sourcing more drought-tolerant Mediterranean-style plants, South African, and Australian native plants. Still, with a new philosophy, some plants were still dying even with supplementary hand watering. I had no microclimate to work with, newly planted trees were too small and the soil was too exposed. So I began planting what are called "nursery plants," plants that would establish extremely quickly and that did not require any irrigation. These nursery plants gave protection and acted as companions to assist other slower-growing, long-term plants. Once the more favourable long-term plants became established, the nursery plants were mostly removed. However, some of these still exist happily in the garden today. Also, many layers of cow manure, pea straw, pelletized manure, and mulch were used to improve the soil structure and growing conditions, and the garden beds have been planted quite densely to adapt to the soil microclimate and shade the root zones. Some of the nursery plants I used included *Myoporum parvifolium*, *Artemisia powis castle*, *Eremophila kalbarri carpet*, *Geranium*, and *Euphorbia wulfenii*. Unfortunately, the *Euphorbia wulfenii* became an environmental hazard as it was self-seeding all over the property, so I had to eliminate all these species before it spread into our native vegetation garden areas.

Some of my favourite plant species used in the garden include different species of *Salvia*, *Echium*, *Teucrium*, *Agastache*, *Sedum*, *Echinops*, *Verbena*, *Melianthus*, *Miscanthus*, *Veronica*, *Echinacea*, *Anisodonteia*, *Coreopsis*, *Montanoa*, *Erysimum* and *Calamagrostis* just to name a few. In designing my planting scheme, I first think about the flower colour theme of the garden bed I want to work on, eg. pink and purple with a pop of yellow. Secondly, I look at foliage colour and texture. Different shades of greens, grey, silver and blue foliage, the shape of the leaves, large, small, round, pointed, thick and leathery, fine and feathery, etc. Thirdly I look at the plant habit, form, shape, and size and how they complement each other, e.g., mounding spreading plants next to vertical upright plants, small fine foliage next to large bold rounded leaves, soft flowing grasses next to solid evergreen woody shrubs, and small rounded perennials next to sturdy rigid succulents.

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**Open Gardens South Australia Inc:** is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

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Each section of the garden has been designed with a subtle change in theme but with a common subject across the whole site to achieve continuity, cohesion, and balance. This is achieved with the repetition of certain plant species but more importantly with the use of hard landscaping materials. These unique landscaping materials give our garden a sense of place as they are mostly sourced from this property. The large ironstone rocks were moved from the back of the property and carefully placed as garden edging and retaining wall structures as we sculpted the land to create garden spaces. The rocks are naturally bold and have a strong presence, and we were also very lucky to stumble across a huge deposit of natural ironstone gravel on top of the hill just behind the shed. We used this as a surface for all our paths.

The surrounding 7 acres of native Blue Gums and grassy woodland was neglected and completely overrun with wild Olive trees which we removed completely in 2018 to reveal many ground-dwelling native flowers that include Chocolate Lilies, Garland Lilies, Twiggy Bush-pea, Fan flower, Common Everlastings, New Holland Daisies, Southern Rock-fern, Flax Lily and many native grasses. In recent years we have also planted a selection of native indigenous plant species to compliment this natural environment.



The gardens that open for us are chosen to reflect a great diversity of styles and may even challenge the conventional view of what constitutes a garden. While aspects of a garden may not be to your taste, we urge you to celebrate this diversity. Please remember you are visiting a private home and show respect and sensitivity for the owners who have so generously shared their garden with you. Thank you.